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CIA boss: We erred; more grilling today

By Bob Minzesheimer
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Acting CIA Director Robert Gates faces more tough Senate questions today — after saying Tuesday the agency erred in “not pressing to reverse” President Reagan’s order to keep the Iran deal from Congress.

Gates said he’d consider resigning if ordered to conceal a secret operation from Congress for more than a few days.

Gates, nominated to replace William Casey, is likely to be confirmed by the Senate — but not until after the Tower Commission report Feb. 26.

He tried Tuesday to distance himself from the arms deal and to defend Casey, who resigned after being stricken with a brain tumor.

■ Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, asked Gates if he’d have supported the decision to authorize arms sales to Iran and not to inform Congress.

Gates: “I probably would have recommended against it.”

■ Gates said the agency broke its rules in arranging a flight to Iran in 1985.

“We should have protested more vigorously our involvement . . . where there were significant elements unknown to us and where we mistrusted key figures.”

■ He said ex-National Security Council aide Oliver North “made a cryptic remark” about the contras and Swiss bank accounts on Oct. 9.

But he said it would have been irresponsible to immediately tell Congress about such “flimsy speculation.”

Gates denied that Casey misled the committee when he omitted any reference to contra suspicions on Nov. 21.

■ In secret testimony released from a Dec. 4 hearing, Gates said the CIA was caught “in a ‘Catch-22’ situation.”

“We had the law telling us to stay the hell away from everything having to do with the contras . . . And yet, now we are being held accountable for not knowing how they funded it.”